

# Commissioner's Corner

## A LETTER FROM BRIGID SHEA

Dear Resident,

It's been just over eight months since I've taken office as a Travis County Commissioner and my staff and I have been hard at work to address my top priorities. The most urgent issue is working to fix our broken property tax appraisal system. The legislature took no action, despite local representatives such as Senator Watson, introducing great bills. Our only other recourse is through the local courts.

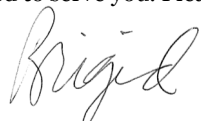
While I'm disappointed the County took no action, I am thrilled that the Austin City Council voted to file a historic legal challenge of unfair appraisals. Our work contributed to this success. (see Appraisal story on page 4)

Another urgent priority is water conservation. Despite the rains, our region is becoming hotter and drier, so we must conserve as much water as possible. I'm proud to have championed Travis County's leadership in creating PACE, a first of its kind program, to enable greater energy and water conservation. (see PACE story on page 3)

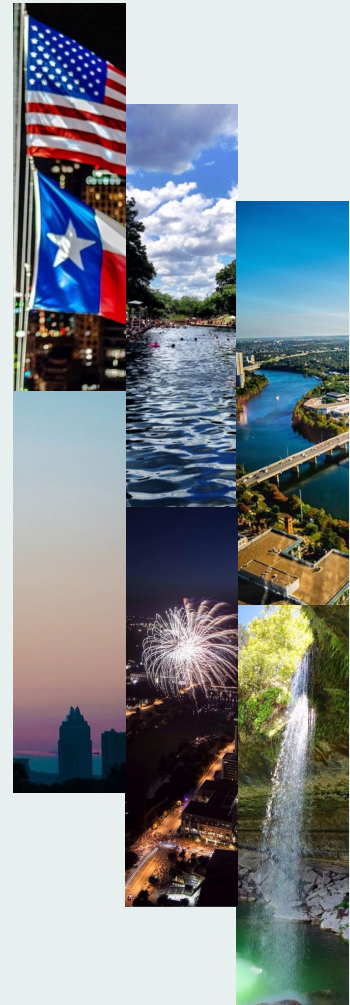
Transportation is another key issue we're working on. While there is a need to expand roads, we must do it carefully in order to not harm our community in the process. One major effort has been to push the toll road authority, Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority, to not rush forward with plans for a double decker toll bridge over Lady Bird Lake with a flyover next to Austin High School. We're oppose to this plan and want a comprehensive examination of alternative solutions. Learn more about this at our community forum on Tuesday, October 13th at Austin High School. (see Transportation story on page 2)

I'm proud of what my incredible staff and I have accomplished in such a short time and I feel honored to serve you. Please call or come visit us at any time.

Best regards,




*Photo taken by Jerome Guerrero with the Travis County Purchasing Office*



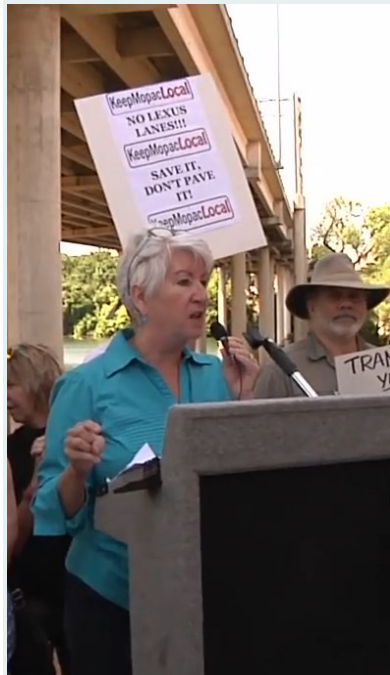
Click on a photo to go to each photographer's Instagram account. Left to Right; photo taken by Kyle Miller (@\_KMIL), photographer unknown and photo posted by @365THINGSAustin, photo taken by Dillon Magnuson (@NINJA.STYLE), photo taken by Jay Ybarra at (@PHOTO.JAY), photo taken by @J\_TYPE, and photo taken by April Cumming (@APRILCUMMING)

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*ACC Trustee Mark Williams, former Council Member Laura Morrison, and Commissioner Shea present to RMI executives*



*Commissioner Shea speaks at Save It Don't Pave It Rally, a protest against the double decker toll bridge over Lady Bird Lake*

## ROCKY MOUNTAIN INSTITUTE VISITS

Rocky Mountain Institute (RMI), a leading think tank that focuses on solving the toughest long-term obstacles with the efficient and restorative use of resources, is looking for a startup city for their innovative transportation initiative. Austin has been chosen as a finalist, and if picked, RMI will provide important resources to help Austin become a leader in global mobility.

Commissioner Shea took the lead for the County and joined forces with former Council Member Laura Morrison to host a reception and a briefing presentation

with community leaders to convince RMI executives that Austin would be the best choice.

"If necessity is the mother of invention, then Austin's congestion problems are the perfect petri dish for smart mobility solutions" Shea said to the RMI Mobility Executive Team. The final city selection decision is scheduled for September 3rd.

Visit the web page that Morrison and Shea assembled for RMI with the community campaign information [here](#).

## UPDATE: SOUTH MOPAC TOLL ROADS

With traffic continuing to worsen, the demand for transportation solutions is at an all time high for residents of Travis County and central Texas. Pursuing creative and effective solutions is a top priority for Commissioner Shea. That's why she signed up to serve on the boards of the Capital Area Metro Planning Organization (CAMPO), the Austin-San Antonio Corridor Council, and the Lone Star Rail.

One of the first issues Shea tackled after entering office was when the toll road authority, Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority (CTRMA), dramatically expanded their original design for South Mopac Toll Roads and was rushing it through approval. The expansion, which Shea opposes, includes a proposed double decker toll bridge over Lady Bird Lake, with a flyover next to Austin High School. There is also a plan to connect to IH-35, potentially add-

ing 50,000 cars and trucks daily to MoPac. To alert the community on CTRMA's plans, Commissioner Shea, Austin mayor, city council members, school board members, and other community leaders, hosted a packed community forum on March 31st at Austin High School. Afterwards, more than 3,000 comments were submitted urging reconsideration.

Shea and community groups are continuing to push the CTRMA to work with City of Austin transportation dept, which has proposed alternative designs. Shea and community leaders will host a follow up community forum on Tuesday, October 13 at Austin High School (1715 W Cesar Chavez) Please plan to attend.

Watch this brief, powerful video on the harm the proposed double decker bridge could cause. View video [here](#).

*"I feel strongly the community should have a say in these plans," said Shea. "That's why I'm convening these community meetings."*



*Commissioner Brigid Shea and Commissioner Gerald Daugherty at the PACE luncheon*

## LEADING THE STATE WITH PACE

Travis County is the first community in the state to create an innovative program that encourages greater energy and water conservation. PACE (Property Assessed Clean Energy) is a creative and private financial tool that enables commercial property owners to upgrade older inefficient buildings with no up-front costs (see links & details in sidebar). Commissioner Shea and Commissioner Gerald Dougherty championed the program and co-sponsored the resolution in March to establish the program in the county.

Shea and Daugherty recently hosted a forum (view [here](#)) for local business leaders on how the program can benefit them. Simon Properties executive, Kristene Canady, told the crowd that Simon plans to invest \$500 million in PACE upgrades within the next 5 years. Simon is the largest developer of shopping malls in the U.S. and owns the Domain, Barton Creek and Lakeline Malls in Austin. “This is one of those rare win-win situations where county government can enable businesses to do the right thing, at no cost to taxpayers,” said Shea. “This program has the potential to save hundreds of millions of gallons of water each year, and similarly reduce energy use.”

While the program doesn’t apply to tax-exempt entities like County or City government, Shea has been encouraging a water conservation initiative in the county. This initiative would convert air conditioning systems in County buildings from using treated drinking water to using treated waste water. County Facilities Director, Roger El-Khoury, estimates the County would save over 11 million gallons of treated water a year by converting just 4 large County buildings downtown. This is an example of a conservation initiative that could be utilized by commercial building owners through the PACE program. Shea plans more PACE briefings for the community in the future.

To be added to our email list please contact [Kristian.caballero@traviscountytexas.gov](mailto:Kristian.caballero@traviscountytexas.gov)

### MORE INFO ON PACE

Interested parties seeking more information should go to:

[www.keepingpaceintexas.org](http://www.keepingpaceintexas.org)

[www.texaspaceauthority.org](http://www.texaspaceauthority.org)

Full video of the PACE luncheon can be found at Commissioner Shea’s official YouTube channel. Video can be accessed by clicking on the photo below.



*Photo captured of YouTube video*

### BACKGROUND ON PACE

The Texas legislature passed SB 385 in 2013, which allows Texas counties and cities to work with private sector lenders and commercial property owners to finance energy efficient improvements. These agreements are done through the PACE program and require owners to willingly enforce contractual assessments on the property. PACE loan terms may extend up to 20 years, creating utility cost savings that surpass the initial amount of the loan payments. This results in the improvements generating positive cash flow with no out-of-pocket cost to the property owners.



*Image courtesy of PACE’s website*



## SHEA TACKLES UNFAIR PROPERTY TAX APPRAISALS

Addressing unfair property tax appraisals is one of Commissioner Shea's top priorities. Working closely with Mayor Pro Tem Kathie Tovo and Mayor Steve Adler, Shea helped rally support for the city's *historic* challenge of the under appraisal of commercial property. That challenge grew out of the city's study of property valuations which showed commercial property was undervalued by 47% (view the study [here](#)). The challenge is going to District Court and if successful it could reverse the trend that has been shifting a growing property tax burden onto homeowners.



*Property Tax Appraisal Forum at First Unitarian Universalist Church*

"This is a hair-on-fire problem for our residents and we have to do everything we can to fix it" said Shea. The city voted 9-1 to challenge the unfair appraisals. "This community is in absolute pain over the skyrocketing cost of living, the most pressing being housing," Shea told the *Austin Monitor*. "And one of the structural flaws that's contributing to a higher cost of living is the fact that commercial properties are not paying their fair share, so an unfair burden is being pushed onto homeowners."

**"Commercial properties are not paying their fair share, so an unfair burden is being pushed onto homeowners."**

As part of Commissioner Shea's on-going effort to change this unfair system, she hosted a second annual Community Forum on Property Tax Appraisals on May 19<sup>th</sup> at the First Unitarian Universalist Church (photo above). Speakers included Mayor Steve Adler, Mayor Pro Tem Kathie Tovo, Tax Assessor/Collector Bruce Elfant, Chief Appraiser Marya Crigler, Senior Fiscal Analyst Dick Lavine with Center for Public Policy Priorities, and Leigh Murrin with Real Values for Texas (view video [here](#)). The forum's Q & A session provided attendees information on challenging residential appraisals and ongoing efforts to make the system more fair. View the forum [here](#).

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## JUNETEENTH CELEBRATION

Two days before Juneteenth, our nation was reminded that the negative effect of our history still lingers. The Charleston shooting that killed 9 people in the historic Emanuel AME Church was an act of hatred and intolerance that reminds us, we have much more work to do. Despite this tragedy, communities everywhere exemplified unity with mutual respect and love. Travis County demonstrated this by hosting its 26th annual Juneteenth Celebration on June 19th, attracting a great turnout of passionate people.

On June 20<sup>th</sup> Commissioner Shea joined Travis County Judge Sarah Eckhardt, Senator Kirk Watson and fellow elected officials, employees and community leaders in Austin's annual Juneteenth Parade.

Shea and staff members also attended a candlelight Vigil at the Rosewood Park Pavilion in remembrance of the nine lives lost in Charleston. "Hopefully, through this tragedy, communities will strengthen their resolve to work for greater unity and understanding" Shea said after the event.



*Left: District Judge Lora Livingston, Constable Carlos Lopez, Senator Kirk Watson, Commissioner Brigid Shea, Tax assessor Bruce Elfant, County Judge Sarah Eckhardt and staff ride in the Juneteenth Parade*



*Candlelight Vigil at Rosewood Park Pavilion  
Photo courtesy of Cindy Elizabeth Photography  
<http://cindyelizabeth.squarespace.com/>*



*Supporters of the Gay Pride Week proclamation  
join Commissioner's Court for a photo*

## PRIDE IN AUSTIN

The Supreme Court took the monumental step of declaring marriage equality as constitutionally legal, and Commissioner Shea celebrated the ruling over the July 4th holiday weekend at a community wedding reception hosted by Barr Mansion. The event honored all the Travis County's newlyweds.

Commissioner Shea and Judge Sarah Eckhardt co-sponsored a proclamation declaring August 22 - 30 as "Gay Pride Week" in Travis County. This year marks the 25 anniversary of Austin PRIDE.

## BRIGID SHEA

Brigid Shea was elected Travis County Commissioner for Precinct Two in 2014. She previously served on the Austin City Council and has a proven history as a champion for consumer, electoral, and environmental reforms. Shea is the co-founder of SOS, Austin's historic law to save Barton Springs, and has been an advisor to LCRA, Seton, the City of Austin, and many others. Additionally, her work with a client recently won the TCEQ Environmental Excellence award and she serves on many boards, including the national board of Clean Water Action. She is a native of North Dakota, but came to Austin in 1988 to start the Texas chapter of Clean Water Action. Prior to that, she had been an award-winning journalist at NPR stations in Minnesota and Philadelphia. She is married to John Umphress and is proudly the mother of 2 teenage boys.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

- Commissioners Court is held every Tuesday at 700 Lavaca, Austin Texas, starting at 9:00 AM
- September 25th 6:00 PM: Public Hearing on Tax Rate & Budget at 700 Lavaca, Austin
- September 25th: Public Hearing on Tax Rate & Budget at 700 Lavaca, Austin. Time TBD
- September 29th 9:00 AM: Budget Approval at 700 Lavaca, Austin
- October 13th 6:00 - 8:00 PM: South Mopac Toll Road Community Forum at Austin High School 1715 W Cesar Chavez St., Austin
- Open House Bond Election discussions for new Civil & Family Court Complex in Precinct 2:
  - Wed. September 9, 7:00 – 8:00 PM at 5604 Joe Sayers Ave. Austin– Constituent's residence
  - Sat. September 19, 10:00 AM– 12:00 PM at the Northwest Recreational Center, 2913 Northland Dr. Austin
  - Sat. October 17, 10:00 AM– 12:00 PM at the Westside Meeting Hall/Offices, 4501 FM 620 N. Austin
  - Tue. October 20, 6:00 – 8:00 PM at the Justice of the Peace Office Building, 10409 Burnet Rd. Austin

For more information on all Open House discussions please click [here](#) or go to Commissioner Shea's website [www.traviscountytexas.gov/](http://www.traviscountytexas.gov/)

### Brigid Shea

700 Lavaca, Suite 2.700  
Austin, TX 78701  
Phone: 512-854-9222  
Fax: 512-854-6446  
E-mail:

CommissionerPct2@traviscountytexas.gov

### Barbara Rush- Chief of Staff

Barbara.rush@traviscountytexas.gov

### Melissa Velasquez- Policy Advisor

Melissa.velasquez@traviscountytexas.gov

Kristian Caballero– Community Outreach Coordinator

Kristian.Caballero@traviscountytexas.gov

Christina Nunez– Communications Intern

Christina.nunez@traviscountytexas.gov

### Alexander Chase- Policy Intern

alexwchase@utexas.edu

## FOLLOW COMMISSIONER BRIGID SHEA ON SOCIAL MEDIA FOR UPDATES



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COMMISH\_SHEA



# MEET OUR STAFF

Barbara Rush

Chief of Staff



Melissa Velasquez

Policy Advisor



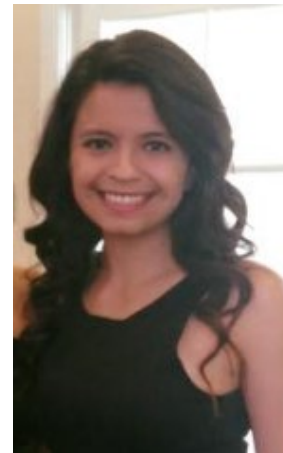
Kristian Caballero

Community Outreach Coordinator



Christina Nuñez

Communications



Alexander Chase

Policy Intern

